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Travelling through times and spaces: Making to meet Akbar with Machiavelli. Some considerations about Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008)

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The Enchantress of Florence (2008)

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To begin with and Rushdian intertextuality

Reading a fine book and then coming to its finishing I begin to feel sad because tomorrow I shall not meet these people, figures, personalities, whom I have begun to like while reading the novel (of course one may argue that I can reread the book from the first page tomorrow, but this, of course, is not the point). It is as if Salman Rushdie in his novel *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008) wants to make the reader understand such a feeling. When, at the end of the novel, Niccolò Vespucci having ended his story, has himself, disappeared, Mughal emperor Akbar has a feeling of deep disappointment, considering:

Vespucci's story was concluded. He had crossed over into the empty page after the last page, beyond the illuminated borders of the existing world, ...¹⁾

By the way, even in this sentence of the story, as everywhere in the novel, there seem to be at least two levels or a double sense of meaning, that is "the illuminated borders" may be read as well as the borders of the painted Mughals' world in its miniatures.

It should be mentioned at once that S. Rushdie adds a "Bibliography"

of “Books” and “Web Sites” at the end of the novel. As for me there arises the question, why a bibliography, including, historical and scholarly texts, should appear at all in what I take as a fictitious novel?! But as for “story”, it should be mentioned at once too, that Italo Calvino’s collection of Italian stories appears among the cited (and, again not cited) titles in the appended bibliography of the novel²⁾.

I would like to mention here as well that *The Enchantress of Florence* becomes in some short passages an intertext of and with S. Rushdie’s earlier novels. For example, if in the novel the motifs of travel, departing and coming (not) home are omnipresent, these of course remember of Salman Rushdie’s *The Wizard of Oz* (see my Bibliography at the end). The motif of the “potato witches” in the fifteenth chapter of the novel appears already in S. Rushdie’s *Shalimar the Clown* (see my Bibliography at the end).

Rushdie’s novel is, indeed, so full of details and literary citations that it is sometimes not so easy to follow. A ‘citation’ which already seems to belong to some standard repertoire of the author Rushdie, and/ or his narrator is for example the scene in which Arcalia is putting his own things and what he has robbed of Hauksbank easily into his “particolored greatcoat”, a coat of meravilious abilities:

He had won the coat at cards in a hand of *scarabocion* played against an astonished Venetian diamond merchant who could not believe that a mere Florentine could come to the Rialto and beat the locals at their own game. The merchant, a bearded and ring-leted Jew named Shalakh Cormorano, had had the coat specially made at the most famous tailor’s shop in Venice, known as *Il Moro Invidioso* because of the picture of a green-eyed Arab on

the shingle over its door, and it was an occultist marvel of a great-coat, its lining a catacomb of secret pockets and hidden folds within which a diamond merchant could stash his valuable wares, and a chancer such as “Uccello di Firenze” [i.e. Arcalia] could conceal all manner of tricks. (pp. 19–20)

This fine ‘miniature’ of description must remind the diligent reader of the important role of Shakespeare’s *Othello* (“*Il Moro Invidioso*”) and *The Merchant of Venice* (“The merchant, a bearded and ringleted Jew named Shalakh Cormorano”) in Rushdie’s novel *The Moor’s Last Sigh*.

Then I want to mention that the novel if read with only some attention is full of Rushdie’s literary discussion and interpretation of colonialism up to now. One only has to think of the Jesuit missionaries sent from Goa to Akbar’s court, or the “The New World” as it appears in the novel. But here I shall not discuss these aspects which need an own study.

The Structure of the Novel and the Story

The novel comprises at least four stories, which, quite independent, are nonetheless intertwined meticulously, what at first may seem not so easily be undone, or to be accepted by the reader, because the stories develop in most different historical times - and places. For India this is the time of the Mughal emperor’s grandfather Babur and Akbar’s own time. For Europe, mainly Italy, and for the “New World”, this is the time of Machiavelli, and the parallel time to that of Akbar’s reign, when thinking for e.g. of the three Jesuits sent to Akbar’s court in 1580 (s. here, pp. 10 ss).

Before coming to some of these stories, it might be useful to frame the total of non/historical, and, or im/possible events by giving the lifetime of

Niccolò Machiavelli: 1469–1527 and the Moghul Emperor Akbar: 1542–1605 (reign: 1556–1605), both historical dates. The two cannot have been in contact with one another, but it is through the narrator that their life, better some of their ideas are put into one context. Then there are the in the novel discussed lifetimes of Qara Kōz and Argalia. Qara Kōz, of whom it is told to be Babur's, that is Akbar's grandfather's mysterious sister, beside his other sister Khanzada Begum, is said to have been seventeen years (p. 213) at the time of Babur's second defeat of Samarkand (p. 214) and that is in 1504³⁾. At the time of the battle of Chaldiran in 1514⁴⁾, between the Safavids and the Ottomans, in which Sha Ismail I was beaten, Argalia is said to have been forty five (p. 216, for the battle see pp. 218–221). After that battle Qara Kōz begins to accompany Argalia, who at that moment enters the services of Selim the Grim, after that returns to Italy, namely Machiavelli's Florence, where Argalia dies ("Argalia was dead- "At least he died in his hometown . . .", Doria said", p. 333), from where Qara Kōz will leave, not with Argalia but with Ago Vespucci to Genua and then, on the suggestion of Andrea Doria to the "New World". That means, as Akbar reckons rightly, the man, Niccolò Vespucci, or as he has named himself, Mogor dell' amore, aged between thirty and forty, who has come to his court and claims until to the end of his story: "'My mother was Qara Kōz, your grandfather's sister, the great enchantress, and she learned how to stop time.'", (p. 340), can by no means be Qara Kōz's son. After Niccolò Vespucci has already left doomed Fatehpur Sikri the reader learns from a nightly conversation between Akbar and his aunt Qara Kōz (sic, pp. 347–348), that Niccolò Vespucci must be the son of Qara Kōz's child or of "the Mirror's", (one of the many mirrors in the novel) daughter ("mirror of her

mother and of the woman [i.e. Qara Kōz] whose mirror the Mirror had been" (p. 348). And his father, as is further revealed in this same place, was this later mirror's own father (one can only guess if it is meant that by this is meant Ago Vespucci), he is a child of "*incest*" (e.g. p. 338). Niccolò Vespucci himself has been deceived about all this, and believes to be what he is not, Akbar's uncle. But this believe enables him to tell Akbar his fantastic story, which brings together, among other things, Machiavelli's and Akbar's time. And this, putting one of the main results of this study at the beginning, seems for me to be the main reason to tell the story of *The Enchantress of Florence* at all. That is a special kind of comparative culture and cultural history, by mirroring places and times, which in history lay so much afar from themselves, but are made, humanly, so similar in the novel.

The first story to be narrated, thus, is that of Argalia/ Arcalia, told by Niccolò Vespucci : "'There was once an adventurer-prince named Argalia, also called Arcalia, a great warrior who possessed enchanted weapons, and in whose retinue were four terrifying giants, and he had a woman with him, Angelica ...'" (p. 19). This beginning of a story which, with the name of Angelica, reminds the reader of texts like that of Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, is repeated on various occasions (s.e.g. p. 85), but its succession is, as it may seem to an irritated reader, first like being 'surpressed' by the narrator who seems to want to tell his story to a most elevated price (cf. p. 19, Vespucci with Hauksbank; p. 90, Vespucci with Akbar), however, it develops to one of the main streams of the novel. He steals himself into to the role of an Italian "Ambassador" by the Queen of England to Akbar's court (p. 23) what makes captain John Hauksbank die if not be murdered by Arcalia (p. 23, as for murder see p. 19 where Arcalia is said to

have Hauksbank make drink “laudanum”). The death of captain Hauksbank nearly costs Vespucci his own life, because the crew has followed him and is asking Akbar to make the process of the ‘fake ambassador’. Akbar who at this point has more than one doubt about the identity of Vespucci, e.g. when comparing his outfit with the Spanish ambassador of King Philip of Spain, who had come with elephants, Arab horses and many gifts to his court (pp. 66–67), whereas Arcalia has spent his first night in Fatehpur Sikri in a “whorehouse” (p. 67), puts him into jail and is intended to punish him with death, but the process turns out to Vespucci’s favour and to the blame of Hauksbank’s crew. After that Vespucci boldly declares to Akbar, who is pressing him: ““Once and for all, spit the damned thing out””, to be: ““Your relative by blood. In point of fact: your uncle”” (p. 98).

Very much later one learns that that Argalia is a contemporary of Machiavelli and that and how his story began in Florence: “In the beginning there were three friends, Antonino Argalia, Niccolò “il Machia”, and Ago Vespucci” (p. 132). As for Florence and what happens there I shall return to this same sentence one time more. As for the story to be followed here, Argalia is orphaned “before he was ten years old” (p. 136), that is because of one other of the many plagues after that of 1348 described in Boccaccio’s “Foreword” of *Il Decameron*, in Florence, and he decides to leave Florence. For a time Vespucci uses the name “Uccello di Firenze” (p. 14):

Giovanni Milano, who had been born Sir John Hauksbank in Scotland a hundred years before. In France he was “Jean Aubainc” in the German-speaking cantons of Switzerland he was “Hans Hoch”, and in Italy it was Giovanni Milano - “Milano” be-

cause a *milan* was a hawk - leader of the White Company, erst-while general of Florence, and victor, on Florence's behalf, of the battle of Polpetto against the hated Venetians (pp. 136–137). (For John Hauksbank, in history and art see below.)

Vespucci is still remindful of John Hauksbank as a great condottiere, the age of which, that is of the condottieri, as it is said - by the way historically - has come to an end now, that is with Argalia's youth. But Argalia knows there is still one great figure of that historically type of fighters: "The greatest remaining mercenary fighter, according to Argalia, was Andrea Doria⁵⁾, leader of the Band of Gold, who just then were busy with the liberation of Genoa⁶⁾ from French control" (p. 137). Argalia is ready to give up his Christian faith: "I might turn Turk myself. Argalia the Turk, Wielder of the Enchanted Lance, with four huge Swiss giants, Muslim converts, in my retinue. Swiss Mohammendans, yes. Why not. When you're a mercenary it's gold and treasure that talk, and for that you have to go east." (pp. 137–138). At one point Argalia declares:

... I'll be dying on a burning caravel outside Constantinople with a Turkish scimitar in my gut. (p. 137)

He will not die in that way, but he will die as a Turk, as he is named later in the novel, and that is as a mighty Turk, as e.g.: "Argalia the Turk, was simply too powerful for Lorenzo [i.e. de' Medici] to be able to move against him openly." (p. 289)

Machiavelli and events in his time

Machiavelli's life during his exile outside Florence as described in the novel has made me think repeatedly, while reading the novel, of one of the

most famous and frequently cited letters by Machiavelli. Machiavelli's life itself is described with many details, one can guess much about his relation with his wife, and about Machiavelli's political carrier or failure, as e.g. about his torture during which he suffered the "*strappado*" (p. 238). Here I cite the mentioned letter from a book by Paul Larivaille, and while he comments that this letter, as a response to Francesco Vettori reaches even "parody"⁷⁾ it is for me one of the most beautiful letters by Machiavelli. In this letter from 10 December, 1513 strikes me the part where Machiavelli describes how he leaves his home in the morning to do some cuttings in his woods taking with him a book by Dante, Petrarca or "one of these minor poets like Tibullo, Ovidio and the like" ("o uno di questi poeti minori, come Tibullo, Ovidio et simili"⁸⁾). And how he then, after eating lunch in the "hosteria" and, later, playing there trumps with some beccaio, miller or baker, returns home, where he changes into his official clothes, this, in order to be prepared properly to read and meet the classical authors: "... and revested decently, I enter into the antique courts of the classical writers ..." ("... et rivestito condecientemente, entro nelle antiche corti degli antiqui huomini")⁹⁾. Even if parody would underly here, Machiavelli's attitude towards the classical authors, described as so subtle, moves and makes one think about one's own reading habitudes. The letter is indeed so moving because it shows a politically powerless and helpless Machiavelli, who is still so much political because he is playing trumps with the hard working laborers from the countryside, that he is taking in their opinions, and observing the situation in the field, that is outside Florence. And then, instead of becoming leisurely when coming home and beginning to read the classics, he instead dresses as best as he can in order to be allowed to

appear before his 'teachers' from antiquity in an adequate style.

Machiavelli's religious position as described in the novel, it is said that "He was not a deeply religious man, il Machia, but he was a Christian. He avoided mass, but he believed all other religions to be false" (p. 244), this puts him into a somewhat less interesting position than that of Akbar, who is drawn as searching at least momentarily for religious alternatives. But this description stands in no way against the many citations of the mandrake-plant, which of course is a continuing allusion to Machiavelli's comedy *La Mandragola*, which indeed, especially with the figure of Fra Timoteo is darkly anticlerical but not antichristian.

After Arcalia and Qara Kōz have come to Florence they are welcomed, especially Qara Kōz arises to a position sembling to a saint. However that changes quickly, and, what remains, and I think here is where Rushdie wants to make a point, is her foreignness, otherness, strangeness. This is called by the narrator Qara Kōz's short step "from *enchantress* to *witch*" (p. 297), after she had become momentarily even an idol of "Eastern wisdom" (p. 289). Behind this lie of course much of Rushdie's thinkings about difference as uttered in others of his precedent novels, e.g. expressed with S. Chamcha's fancy to become a real British in *The Satanic Verses*, and with the first Indian/Christian than more Christian/Foreigner paintress Aurora in the *Moor's Last Sigh*. Having been stamped to be a witch she is forced to leave Florence, and as it is shown, even better Italy. After Argalia's death she is led by Ago Vespucci, who, up to that time, different from Argalia, and Machiavelli, who did indeed a lot of diplomatic travelling during his lifetime, and, what goes without saying, different from Ago's famous elder cousin, only now starts the voyage of his life. This leads him

and Qara Kōz first (as for the stories' running in the novel back) to Andrea Doria. He introduces him/ them to "the *Cosmographiae Introductio* by the Benedictine monk Waldseemüller of the monastery of St. Dié-des-Vosges, which came with a vast map that unfolded to cover the floor, a map whose name was almost as big, the *Universalis Cosmographia Secundum Ptholoemaei Traditionem et Americi Vespucci Aliorumque Lustrationes*, the Geography of the World According to the Tradition of Ptolemy and the Contributions of Amerigo Vespucci and Other People" (p. 332)¹⁰.

Time narrated

If thinking - for once in authentical historical dimensions the time of the central story in India must begin at least after February 18, 1580¹¹, because as it is told in the novel the Jesuits Acquaviva and Monserrate are already at Akbar's court which was, historically, at this time at Fatehpur Sikri, and this is a central point in the novel. Akbar had moved from Agra to Fatehpur Sikri in 1571¹².

Acquaviva and Monserrate are two of three Jesuits, who were sent from Goa after Akbar had asked for Jesuits to come to his court in 1578¹³. As for Akbar's historical interest in Christianity as shown in this novel, I would discuss this rather in another study. It may be mentioned that the historical Akbar sent three times ambassadors to Goa to ask for missionaries, that is Jesuits, to come to his palace. It should be mentioned too that there were three sendings of Jesuits ("missions) to Akbar's court, that is in 1580-1583, 1591-1592 and 1594-1600. In the novel Akbar's construction of a hall in which religious questions should be discussed, where the Jesuits participated, is described, and his historical reflections on religion/s are dis-

cussed, as several of his decisions to free the believers from religious bounds. As Akbar in the novel himself expresses, while he wants to be tolerant towards religion he is at the same time imposing his own idea of religion on to the people, disappointedly he closes the hall of discussion. As for the picture of the Jesuits as depicted in the novel, this is quite unfriendly. Nothing is said against their faith, but their activities appear in a shadowy light. This is, for once, due to the fact that they become adversaries of Mogor dell'Amore, who as an Italian defines the Jesuit as helpers of the Portuguese, of which nation they may be. Mogor had taken from Hauksbank his treasures and at last as well a letter from Queen Elizabeth I to Akbar, a letter which represents the reason for Hauksbank's planned mission to the Moghul court. By the way, this letter too belongs to a long string of motifs in which the value of words, as seen by the narrator, is demonstrated. Mogor, as one may have understood before, renders to Akbar a most inviting version of the letter in which Elizabeth shows herself even submissive to Akbar. When Akbar, years later has that same letter translated by another interpreter, he finds out that the content had been rather insignificant. This is one more of the many occasions in which one other important motif of the novel is made proof "Language upon a silvered tongue affords enchantment enough" (p. 73). That is to show, that who wants to read a historical novel in which figures and facts may be relied on, will be disappointed, what counts are the words which make history. Anyway, as the porter of a letter by a heretic Queen Elizabeth, Mogor becomes at once suspect to the Jesuits. When the letter and his assumed role of ambassador of Queen Elizabeth to the Moghul Court are discussed before Akbar Abul Fazl mentions: "... They [i.e. the Jesuits] say

that hers is a nation of thieves and that you are in all probability a spy” (p. 68). Whereupon the conversation unfolds as follows:

“The Portuguese are pirates,” said Mogore dell’Amore. “They are buccaneers and scoundrels. No wise man should trust what they say.”

“Father Acquaviva of the Society of Jesus is an Italian like yourself,” Abul Fazl rejoined, “and Father Monserrate his companion comes from Spain.”

“If they come here under the flag of the scurrilous Portugee,” the other insisted, “then Portugee pirate dogs is what they have become.” (p. 68)

Rushdie is said to have become more unpolitical in his later novels. I would not agree so easily with such a statement. Look at the political potential, Kashmir, globalization etc., in his *Shalimar the Clown*, which does not hide very well beneath the story full of imaginary and phantasy and unreal. Perhaps, at the first look more difficult to discern because the story is put, mainly, into the 16th century, the historico-political element cannot be denied neither in *The Enchantress of Florence*. Behind the historical reflections by Akbar and Machiavelli linger always questions of the post/colonial discussion alive in all of Rushdie’s novels. So, as for my part, I would see a reflection of the Europeans’ assumed role in India in this description of the Jesuits too, even if it is only the reflection of the ridiculousness of the European rivalry in India in the eyes of Akbar, whom neither the Portuguese nor the English really did understand in his importance, at least at that moment.

When the story comes to its end there are mentioned several histori-

cal events which may be taken for narrated time, as there is the death of Birbal in war campaign (pp. 313–314) on which he is accompanied by Mughal dell' Amore, but it is later said that he died in an ambush, that is as the death of Abul Fazl: “Abul Fazl died in an ambush, as Birbal had” (p. 326). If taken historically Birbal's death happened in 1586. And Abul Fazl death occurs in the novel, as historically, with the last rebellion of Akbar's son Salim against his father. In the novel is told that, understanding that of his three sons only Salim would be able as his successor, the other two are said “they were so deep in drink and disease that they might actually die” (p. 326), Akbar forgives his son his uprising and Abul Fazl' death (pp. 326–327). The historical Salim's rebellion, whose own “health”, as e.g. Francis Robinson considers, “was compromised by his own addiction to drink and opium, which might have led him to defy his father”, falls in the year 1602, as the violent death of “Abul Fadl”¹⁴⁾, as in F. Robinson's spelling. Historically Salim returned on his father's word to the court, he is reproved by Akbar and Akbar put his supporters into prison (in the novel we read “As for Salim's mentor Badauni, however, he was thrown into the dirtiest cell of the deepest dungeon of Fatehpur Sikri, and no man or woman except his jailers ever saw him alive again”, p. 327). But Akbar makes to be cared for his health, the tensions between them lessened and: “On 21 October [i.e. 1605], Akbar, unable to speak, invested Salim as his successor”¹⁵⁾. At the very end of the novel Akbar leaves dramatically a literally drained Fatehpur Sikri, because the golden lake from the beginning withdrew its water (pp. 344–346, see here, p. 15), and that is in the novel after Salim's rebellion where it is said of improved Salim: “The Crown Prince's change of heart had come to late. The destruction of

Fatehpur Sikri had begun. The next morning ...” (p. 344). Historically Akbar moved from Fatehpur Sikri in 1598, now again to Agra, that is before Salim’s rebellion¹⁶⁾. That means that the historical time of the end of the novel is let open to interpretation and imagination. Of interest might be that historically in 1585 Hakim died, that is in the year of Akbar campaigning in Afghanistan. In this year Akbar moved the court from Fatehpur Sikri to Lahore¹⁷⁾. If one takes Hakim’s death for Birbal’s the events in the novel could be packed between 1583 and 1585, but this again does not fit to the fact that Mughal dell’ Amore stays at the court up to Salim’s rebellion (pp. 341, 343 et.al.).

The time of the immediate story on the Italian side begins at the end of the 15th century. Machiavelli is in office for the republic, the death of Girolamo Savonarola 1500, the return of the Medici, Machiavelli’s exile outside Florence, the bulk of the events ends in early 16th century, but one still meets the old Andrea Doria who lived until 1560, from here the story moves to “the new world”.

The pictures by Paolo Uccello

After a rather poetic first chapter in which at the very beginning, as one will understand at the end of the book, the very end becomes directly foretold, the second chapter is, perhaps, the most furiously narrated one in the novel. By the way, its content is furious as well. This chapter brings as well the first link between Italy and India, that is high-renaissance Italy and Mughal, that is Akbar’s Mughal India.

Having arrived by the ship running under the command of Scottish captain George Louis Hauksbank (p. 13), that is “Lord Hausksbank of That

Ilk" (p. 14) on Indian shores at Diu and Surat, Vespucci (whom the reader very soon will know under different names¹⁸⁾) at last can begin his final approach to Akbar's palace in Fatehpur Sikri. Passing the most beautiful lake which man may think of just at the time of sunset which makes it appears as an artifice, Vespucci reflects: "*Without water we are nothing . . . Even an emperor, denied water, would swiftly turn to dust*" (p. 8). These same words are repeated, now by the narrator, at the end of the novel, when that lake, together with the vanishing from the story by Vespucci, begins disappearing at a frightening speed of two days: "*Without water we are nothing. Even an emperor, denied water, would swiftly turn to dust. . . .*" (p. 345).

But here I want to proceed first to the second chapter with the meeting or better, less to be called encounter but straightly called crushing of Vespucci and George Louis Hauksbank. This has to be understood an incident as imbedded an historical one into a fictitious one, that is however with as much fictional background, as with authentical historical background - the novel lives by such incidences what one may call a gusto, inconsistencies, non-possibilities, etc. but one will still not be able to deny, there remains something historical not to be overseen, in vice versa overseas - and there are still more seas to come in. (Europe: India, later America).

In short Vespucci, having been found as a stowaway on Hauksbank's ship and forced to identify himself, at this moment introduces himself as Uccello di Firenze, more exactly as "Uccello di Firenze, enchanter and scholar" (p. 14). Understandably Hauksbank breaks into a gorgeous laughter at that self-introduction. And here story stelling of hi(s)/story (whose story at all?) becomes mixed in the finest and subtlest ways. The most fictitious

George Louis Hauksbank of the novel still arrives immediately at his historically justified doubts as for the name:

Lord Hauksbank smiled and sniffed his perfumed kerchief. “Which I might have believed, wizard,” he replied, “if I did not know of the painter Paolo of the same name and place, who created in your township’s Duomo a *trompe l’oeil* fresco in honor of my own ancestor Sir John Hauksbanks, known as Giovanni Milano, soldier of fortune, erstwhile general of Florence, victor of the battle of Polpetto; and if that painter had not unfortunately been dead these many years.” (p. 14)

George Louis Hauksbank’s family name is indeed the variation of that of the historical, mercenary and/ or condottiere, John Hawkwood (1300–1396)¹⁹⁾. (As for the alteration of the name, it should be mentioned already here, it may be considered as a natural continuation of the variation/ adaptation of it, for Giorgio Vasari it is Giovanni Acuto, for Franco Sacchetti it becomes Gian Auguth, Giovanni Augut. And the picture George Louis Hauksbank brings up as proof of his family lineage is the as well historical and still existing portrait of that very John Hawkwood by the Italian painter Paolo Uccello (1397–1475)²⁰⁾. Again for just now easily available citations of pictures by Paolo Uccello, cf.: ステファノ・ズッフィ編、宮下規久郎訳『イタリア絵画・中世から20世紀までの画家とその作品』(*La pittura italiana. I maestri di ogni tempo e i loro capolavori*)、日本経済新聞社2001年、cf. there: pp.60–61. Uccello was borne in Pratovecchio near Arezzo and died in Florence after activities in Florence, Venice, Prato, Padua and Urbino²¹⁾.

At this stage of this modest study it may make wonder why to put so

much attention on a, seemingly, secondary event, which, as one will understand by these words, of course is not to be so. Very soon it becomes clear that Rushdie the author and then his narrator have taken standards from Uccello's pictures and following them partially, developed his/ their own ones for the novel. Let's begin with a detail in Lord Hauksbank's answer to Vespucci's explanations which he just takes for a bland lie, and still he is sensitive enough to mention that the picture of his, let's say here mildly, perhaps only assumed ancestor is a creation in the style of "*trompe l'oeil*" (sic) (p. 14). With this, indirect, declaration, the narrator/ author of *The Enchantress of Florence* makes to understand as well his/ their way of going on, that is, the book will continue as a chain of *mise en abîme* and *trompe l'oeil* effects.

Again, that Rushdie has chosen exactly Uccello from the vast Renaissance pictorial scene for his novel, again, after reading the novel makes no longer wonder, because, one of the most upcoming facts in Uccello's life is his 'personal' fight with *prospettiva*. In Vasari's version of Uccello's life one feels that his failure as an artist at his time, among his contemporaries is claimed to Uccello's stubbornness of his interest in, and continuing including "*prospettiva*" into his pictures, but at the same time the successful use of perspective in his *œuvre* is underlined. At the beginning of Uccello's "Vita" Vasari writes:

Paolo Uccello, an excellent florentine painter, because he was given a sophisticated mind, liked to investigate elaborate and strange pictures of the art of perspective. And with these he spent so much time that, even how fine he would have created these, if he had done the same with his portraits, he would have become a

more rare and admirable [person]. But not doing so he spent himself during his lifetime in willingnesses, and he was no less poor than famous.²²⁾

In the same somewhat pathetic, and here in addition in an anecdotal tone Vasari writes at the end of the short vita, that Uccello at the end of his life, after an incident with Donato²³⁾:

... he shut himself into his house, and, like being humiliated, he did not have any more ardour to go out. And he waited for the perspective ("*prospettiva*"), the which held him poor and intenebrated up to his death. ...²⁴⁾.

and still:

He left one daughter, who knew to draw a picture of his wife, and who used to say that Paulo, during all the night stood awake in his study to find out the expressions of perspective, and while she urged him to sleep, he would say to her: "What a sweet thing is that perspective!".²⁵⁾

I have to let out here more details about the then, indeed interesting differing opinions about perspective. But I would like to mention still that I could not verify another version of the Prospettiva anecdote, as well ascribed to Vasari, according to which Uccello's wife is driven jealous towards 'that Prospettiva' her husband is talking all the night about, behind which/whom she suspects another woman²⁶⁾.

As an illustrating example of Uccello's search for and use of the perspective is often cited his picture of the Great Flood "*Diluvio Universale*"²⁷⁾. The concern about perspective by Uccello and his progress in his studies can be easily understood if one compares e.g. *The Great*

Flood with his no less famous series “*Three Moments of the Battle of San Romano*” “Tre momenti della Battaglia di San Romano”, in which fighting knights on their horses appear almost like a second picture set before the landscape and, even more, like silhouettes²⁸⁾.

Already here I want to mention another often cited picture by Uccello which shows a Saint George fighting the Dragon²⁹⁾. On the right side of this picture a rather young and pale-faced George, seeming still a boy, has just lanced his spear into the nose of the dragon which has begun to bleed from its mouth. The dragon, which belongs already to the left part of the picture, the centre gives view to a nightly landscape with some hill in the back, is painted less fearful but, its face almost astonished, with the points on his wings, which are each dotted with three disks, in fine perspective following the unfolding of each wing, and, right and left, differently coloured, which shows the different reflection of light, under a sky without almost any cloud and the sickle of a moon just beginning to become crescent. The clamsy position of his forelegs adds another tone of comic. Entering from the left side, the end of her robe still outside the picture, comes a no less pale young lady who holds a string in her hand which its fixed to the dragon, and demonstrates the domestication of the beast. This picture evokes much of the sometimes dreamlike atmosphere between historical facts and fiction in which unlikely knights are standing up against a similarly unlikely enemy in a scenery no less unlikely decorated in Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence* as the many times repeated, if in variations, main scene from a story:

“There once was an adventurer prince named Argalia, also called Arcalia, a great warrior who possessed enchanted weapons, and

in whose retinue were four terrifying giants, and he had a woman with him, Angelica . . .” (p. 19)

Of course the onlooker and reader of Rushdie’s novel may at the same time think of the mysterious princess Qara Kōz, the daughter of Umar Sheikh Mirza, who belongs to the generation of Babur, who began to restore the Moghul Empire, (p. 119), that is the princess “Black Eyes” (p. 120), attributed one of the most important roles in the novel.

Looking for “trompe l’oeil” in the *Britanica Concise Encyclopedia* as given in my IC Dictionary, one reads:

trompe l’oeil (French: “deceive the eye”)

Style of representation in which a painted object is intended to deceive the viewer into believing it is the object itself. First employed by the ancient Greeks, trompe l’oeil was also popular with Roman muralists. Since the early Renaissance, European painters have used trompe l’oeil to create false frames from which the contents of still lifes of portraits seemed to spill and to paint window-like images that appeared to be actual openings in a wall or ceiling.

cf. *Britannica*, C.E. in: セイコーインスツル株式会社, S II, SR-G 10000

The great trompe l’oeil story in Rushdie’s novel is told by Vespucci that is better to say, the story he himself believes into, and of which truthfulness he wants to convey as well Akbar. But Akbar gradually understands the European young man’s story, that is, it is not only fiction but fiction relying on a very lie having been made to the European narrator

by his parents. However Akbar likes to hear to him, as he is telling his story. So the whole novel, more than being a fine story, is about how to create a fine story, being history, fiction, imagination, lie etc. at the same time, a story that is worth hearing at. And if this would really be so, would not the narrator, and perhaps the author, Rushdie himself, seem to say, that with all historical (colonial), social, religious etc. problems it is still worth to write a story to invite the reader into something transgressing these, not by making them forget (this would be opium-literature for which believer?), but to put them into a place on which light falls from astonishing angles.

So if the reader does not like fiction or fictional worlds, and these put besides reality, he should stop reading this novel. As a reader one must make a compact with the author, and one accepts that Alice can communicate without any problem with the hare at the tea-party, as the still wooden Pinocchio with whom will become his father.

However, as well this may be said as a result already here, while Alice and Pinocchio seem to win by re/entering human society through the story, story telling itself becomes again a problem in this novel by Rushdie. As it is said at the very beginning of the novel (by Mogore dell'Amore): "*Without water we are nothing, . . . Even an emperor, denied water, would swiftly turn to dust. Water is the real monarch and we are all its slaves.*" (p. 8, italics as in the original), this same sentence is repeated from Akbar's view at the end of the novel: "*Even an emperor, denied water, would swiftly turn to dust. Water is the real monarch and we are all its slaves*" (p. 345). And he does this observation after he has dismissed the European story-teller, liar or what you want to hold of him. For me, here as well enters a question/ problem of narrating and this is in a special form related to Rushdie's

world of story telling. After the dictum of the fatwa by Ayatollah Khomeini and the Iranian government, Rushdie did not publish a novel which should follow the *Satanic Verses* (1988), what he did however in 1995 with the *Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), a novel intendedly compact of social-religious-political problems. Meanwhile however he had published his *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990), a story about a story-teller who has lost his tongue and is on the search to refind it, as he luckily does, so that this becomes as well a metaphor of Rushdie's *aphasia* in literary terms. Would it be to go to far, if saying that the end of the world of Fatehpur Sikhrī is ascribed to an end of story telling, and in this context, story telling which transcends cultural borders.

By the way I would like to put it here just as a question, how Rushdie does evaluate literature and culture, here especially from central Europe and India. If one accepts the narrator's version and that is here taking Akbar's angle of view, the European 'story teller' has lost, his story has been finally revealed as a lie - the reader, of course, can still make anything of this. That is, Indian story-telling, telling lies/fictions is at least at this point considered above European one: and if one wants to confirm such a point of view, that is inside the fictitious realm of the novel, one might think of the so many citations from traditionally, classical 'all-India' (i.e. of course going beyond Hindu) culture/ literature.

Back to Florence and again to Fatehpur Sikri via "The New World"

The story in Florence begins with the friendship of three friends, all from this city, these are "Antonino Argalia, Nicolò "il Machia"³⁰⁾ and Ago Vespucci" (p. 132). When they are young they are going through the woods

nearby Florence to look for the in/famous “mandrake”, and by this and several other occasions Nicolò Machiavelli’s *Mandrake (Mandragola)* is omnipresent but without being cited any time. The story, going to and forth India and Italy must of course break up the story of mainly Machiavelli’s life, of Mogor, who will take the leading role at the end of the novel, of Ago Vespucci, by the way a younger cousin of Amerigo Vespucci, two traveling, the non travelling one bringing Qara Kōz to America, the exile of Machiavelli and his fine letter about his life there³¹⁾.

There the lie, more politely absolute fiction is created, and on the other hand the generation problem is made to understand, that is, perhaps one more major point of the novel, how to combine, at that age even geographically/historically different places and times. Ago Vespucci, Argalia, Machia³²⁾, at the beginning of their friendship to their old age, the journey with Princess Qara Kōz from Machiavelli’s time’s Italy to the so called New World, that is America, and from there to India, behind that lies the long story of Qara Kōz, with for example, her arrival in Ottoman Turkey, at the heyday of Ottoman Tulipomania.

However, as Akbar makes unmistakably to understand, Mogor must have been dumbfounded, so he did not come with mischievous ambitions to Mughal court, but full of his misunderstanding of his really identity. He has taken for reality that he has been born by Princess Qara Kōz (still here the reader is seduced constantly to choose between realities or mirror-worlds), but at the end he has to understand that there had been some “blurring of generations” (p. 348).

One might ask oneself if this last revelation had been necessary; as a reader one might be content to imagine himself about what is supposed to

have really happened. Anyway, with this revelation there is given a clear line for the reader how to combine - if on the first view impossibly - the age of Machiavelli and that of Akbar's. And for that are given enough hints of parallels, mirrorings in the story. The idea of creating such a double-bottomed system of the story is quite clear to understand. To compare the world in which Machiavelli lived and than his world of ideas with the world of history and that of his ideas, that is by Akbar's could have been done in a straight historical way, but than certain figures in the novel never could have met. By making the figures imagine, often through mirrors and parallels, their time and personal fate, the novel can show possibilities of histories which might have come true - even only through dreams - but as potentially realities. And is not this one of our dreams as a reader to find new - if historically totally impossible - histories which can stimulate our mind to think again about the possibilities of history?!

At the end, or better after reading Rushdie's novel once and again, one agrees upon many of the historico-political statements in this entangling and enticing text. But of course?, there arises the question why this was written all up, besides to becoming, what has been said straightly a "genuinely good" novel where the "[t]he reader wins"³³⁾.

As mentioned before there is much about post/colonialism in the novel, and the variously repeated double stories and the mirrors, might stand as well for East and West and the novel might be a welcome provocation to look into these 'mirrors' again.

- 1) Rushdie, Salman, *The Enchantress of Florence*, Random House, New York, 2008, p. 344, all citations in the text are made from this edition..
- 2) Rushdie, Salman, *The Enchantress of Florence*, op.cit., p. 351: “Calvino, Italo. *Italian Folktales*. Translated by George Martin. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980.” I do not know which edition of the *Italian Folktales* the translator has used, but I give here a recent edition of the Italian text, Italo Calvino, *Fiabe Italiane*, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 2006.
- 3) For the historical circumstances of the battle cf. here: F. Robinson, *The Mughal Emperors*, pp. 114ss, especially, p. 115, cf. bibliography, here.
- 4) For this battle cf. here: F. Robinson, *The Mughal Emperors*, pp. 182ss, especially, p. 183, cf. bibliography, here.
- 5) Andrea Doria, the historical figure and herewith (?) greetings from the shore of the Walt Disney Production, that is with the colorful description of his staff, which reminds of so many figures of those of the: *Pirates of the Carribeans*.
- 6) The liberation from French control took place in 1528.
- 7) Larivaille, Paul, *La vita quotidiana in Italia ai tempi di Machiavelli* (originally: *La vie quotidienne en Italie au temps de Machiavel (Florence et Rome)* Paris, Hachette, 1979), Milano, Rizzoli Editore, 1984, p. 183 P. Larivaille: “... una risposta ricalcata sino alla parodia sulla lettera dell’ambasciatore ...” (... an answer which relies upon the ambassador’s letter up to parody ...).
- 8) Here cited from Larivaille, P., *La vita quotidiana*, op.cit., p. 182. All translations into English, if not said otherwise, are by E.J.
- 9) Here cited from Larivaille, P., *La vita quotidiana*, op.cit., p. 182.
- 10) In this context I have conferred especially to: Christine Johnson, “Plotting the Discoveries. The Cosmographies” in her, that is Ch. J’s., *The German Discovery of the World. Renaissance Encounters with the Strange and Marvelous*, University of Virginia Press, 2008, pp. 47–87, again “FIG. 4. 1507 World Map of Martin Waldseemüller ...”, ibid. pp. 82–83, in which appears the name of “AMERICA”. As explained by Rushdie’s narrator: “On this map [it may be an other map in this same work, E.J.] Ptolemy and Amerigo

were depicted like colossi, ... and upon a large segment of *Mundus Novus* there appeared the word *America*." (p.332). Only by the way may be mentioned here the historical discussion which followed this naming or "Christianing", (see e.g., Stephen Greenblatt). The easiest entrance to this may be the fascinating novel by Stefan Zweig, *Amerigo Vespucci*.

- 11) Father Pierre du Jarric, S.J., (1926), AES, New Delhi, Madras, 1996.
- 12) Francis Robinson, *The Mughal Emperors and the Islamic Dynasties of India, Iran and Central Asia*, Thames and Hudson, London, 2007, p. 129.
- 13) P. du Jarric, *Akbar and the Jesuits*, p. 18.
- 14) F. Robinson, *The Mughal Emperors*, op.cit., p. 137.
- 15) F. Robinson, *The Mughal Emperors*, op.cit., p. 137.
- 16) cf. e.g. F. Robinson, *The Mughal Emperors*, op.cit., p. 130.
- 17) cf. e.g. F. Robinson, *The Mughal Emperors*, op.cit., p. 130. As well Robinson's comments, p. 129.
- 18) For once, in the fictional space of the novel, his name changes for narratological reasons; then historically seen his name is provided as well in a paradigm of regional linguistic richness. Partly repeating myself here, the originally John Hawkwood (leaving to guess whether this is the true spelling/ pronunciation) is given - as we saw already above, intentionally deformed by Rushdie's narrator in order to put him into an intermediate space of hi/story
- 19) For the historical figure of John Hawkwood I use here, first, John M. Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA, USA, Oxford, UK, Victoria, Australia, 2006. John Hawkwood came to Florence in 1375 when the Florentine government feared that Pope Gregory XI would turn against their city and "[t]o prevent this, ... bought off Hawkwood, paying him the immense sum of 130.000, florins.", J. Najemy, op.cit., p. 151. the historical dates, his death. The figure of that portrait I found up to now to verify that picture of that gentleman of that ilkness, is in: Aston, Margaret, ed., *The Panorama of the Renaissance*, Thames and Hudson Ltd, London, 1996, for lacking the English edition here I use the

Japanese translation: マーガレット・アストン編、樺山紘一監訳『ルネサンス百科事典』三省堂 1998 年. cf. there: 「パオロ・ウッチェロ「ジョン・ホークウッド騎馬像」(フィレンツェ、1436 年)」 p. 86.3. In this same documentary study one may find as well an exemplary design in perspective research by Paolo Uccello: 「ウッチェロ「聖杯のためのデザイン」(15 世紀半ば)」 p. 247.6..

- 20) For Paolo Uccello, that is originally, Dono di Paolo, I confer here first, that is in the context of this novel, Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani, da Cimabue, insona a' tempi nostri*, Nell'edizione per i tipi di Lorenzo Torrentio, Firenze 1550, vol.I-II, A cura di Luciano Bellosi e Aldo Rossi, Presentazione di Giovanni Previtali, Torino, Einaudi, (1986), 1991. Giving the abbreviated story of Hawkwood, Vasari thinks it necessary to mention, among the many by him unexplained works that Uccello did:

Fece in Santa Mariad del Fiore, per la memoria di Giovanni Acuto inglese, capitano de' Fiorentini, un cavallo di terra verde tenuto bellissimo, grandezza straordinaria, dove mise il suo nome di lettere grandissime: PAVLI VCELLI OPUS", G. Vasari, *Le Vite*, op.cit., vol. I, p. 239.

In the footnote to this passage it is mentioned especially, that is as if to relate the portrait to the following mentioned event: "Giovanni Acuto è il nome italianizzato del condottiero inglese John Hawkwood morto nel 1394, che guerreggiò al soldo dei Fiorentini conducendoli alla vittoria nella battaglia di Cascina (18 luglio 1364). L'affresco in terra verde fu commissionato a Paolo il 30 maggio 1436, ma il 29 giugno gli fu ordinato di distruggerlo "quia non est pictus ut decet", il 6 luglio è incaricato di rifare l'affresco che gli viene pagato (per ambedue le versioni) il 31 agosto. Il 17 dicembre 1436 dovette correggere l'iscrizione sul sarcofago." Giovanni Acuto is the italianized name of the English condottiere ... The historical dates, that is the exact time from which Hawkbanks was engaged by the Florentines I could not resolve definitely from the texts used here. As for the battle of Cascina of 1364, against Siena, a victory of which it is being

suggested, at least here, to have inducted later the Florentines to commend Uccello with the portrait of him, cf. Vasari, Najemy, p. 224 (cf. my bibliography below).

- 21) The protrait by P. Uccello of John Hawkwood is further mentioned as a main work by Uccello and in the connnection of Uccello's interest in perspective in *Brockhaus Kunst*: "His [i.e. Uccello's] interest was dedicated to to perspective, the study of which and (often somewhat stiffened appearing verification) made him able for master-pieces like that of John Hawkwood" ("... Sein [i.ed. Uccellos] Interesse galt der Perspektive, deren Erforschung und (oft etwas steif wirkende Umsetzung) ihn zu illusionistischen Meisterleistungen wie dem "Reiterbild des John Hawkwood ... befähigte", cited from: Lexikonredaktion des Verlags F.A. Brockhaus, Mannheim, ed., *Brockhaus Kunst. Künstler, Epochen, Sachbegriffe*, F.A. Brockhaus, Mannheim, Leipzig, 2006.3, p. 919.
- 22) Vasari, *Le Vite*, op.cit., p. 236: "Paolo Uccello, eccellente pittor fiorentino, il quale perché era dottato di sofisticato ingegno, si diletto sempre di investigare faticose e strane opere nell' arte della prospettiva; e dentro tanto tempo vi consumò, che se nelle figure avesse fatto il medesimo, ancora che molto buone le facesse più raro e più mirabile sarebbe divenuto. Ove altrimenti faccendo, se la passò in ghiribizzi mentre che visse e fu non manco povero che famoso."
- 23) Donato is "Donata di Betto Bardo, detto Donatello", here cited from: Vasari, *Le Vite*, op.cit., p. 236, annotation 2, cf. Donatello's vita by Vasari, ibidem, 310 – 326. cf. as well: Wolfgang Braunfels, "Ghiberti und Donatello", in: W.B., *Dumont Geschichte der Kunst Italiens*, Du Mont Literatur und Kunst Verlag, Köln, 2005, pp. 219–229.
- 24) Vasari, *Le Vite*, op.cit., p. 240: "si rinchiuse in casa, non avendo ardire come avvilito uscire più fora. Et attese alla prospettiva, la quale lo tenne povero et intenebrato sino alla morte".
- 25) Vasari, *Le Vite*, op.cit., p. 241: "Lasciò de sé una figliuola ... la quale soleva dire che tutta la notte Paulo stava nello scrittoio per trovare i termini della

prospettiva, e mentre ch'ella a dormire lo invitava et egli le diceva: "O che dolce cosa è questa prospettiva!" La quale egli veramente a buono ordine mise in uso, come ancora ne fanno piena fede l'opere sue."

- 26) For this version cf. e.g. Wolfgang Braunfels, '42 Zwei engagierte Künstler: Paolo Uccello und Andrea del Castagno', in: W.B., *Dumont Geschichte der Kunst Italiens*, Du Mont Literatur und Kunst Verlag, Köln, 2005, pp. 260–269, here, p. 261.
- 27) cf. 「パオロ・ウッチェロ」(Paolo Uccello), in: ステファノ・ズッフィ編、宮下規久郎訳『イタリア絵画・中世から20世紀までの画家とその作品』(Text and picture research by Stefano Zuffi with the collaboration of Francesca Castria, *La pittura italiana. I maestri di ogni tempo e i loro capolavori*, Electa, Milan, Elemond Editori Associati, 1997)、日本経済新聞社2001年、cf. there: 「パオロ・ウッチェロ」(Paolo Uccello) pp. 60–61, for a reproduction of a detail of of the Great Flood, cf. there, p. 60, text: 「パオロ・ウッチェロ 大洪水……」and W. Braunfels, *Dumont Geschichte der Kunst Italiens*, op.cit., fig. 181, fig. 182, pp. 260–261. And for Uccello and perspective cf. the here above already cited: Aston, Margaret, ed., *The Panorama of the Renaissance*, op.cit., cited as well here from the jap. transl., and the as well already there mentioned exemplary design in perspective research by Paolo Uccello: "*Uccello, Design fo the Holy Graal*" 「ウッチェロ 「聖杯のためのデザイン」(15世紀半ば)」 ibidem, p. 247.6.
- 28) For figures cf., Aston, Margaret, ed., *The Panorama of the Renaissance*, cited here as well from the jap.transl., op.cit., p. 61.
- 29) W. Braunfels, *Dumont Geschichte der Kunst Italiens*, op.cit., p. 266, fig. 187, "Hl. Georg im Kampf mit dem Drachen, um 1455 – 1460. London National Gallery".
- 30) "il Machia" is no 'invention' by Rushdie or his narrator, c.f. eg. Guido Ruggiero, *Machiavelli in Love. Sex, Self, and Society in the Italian Renaissance*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 2007. Ruggiero begins his "Introduction" citing a letter by Filippo de' Nerli from 1525 in which he writes to Francesco del Nero: "'Given that el Machia

[Machiavelli] is a relative of yours and a very good friend of mine . . .”, p. 1, cf. as well footnote 1 to the “Introduction”, p. 223.

31) *La vita quotidiana ai tempi di Machiavelli*, Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli.

32) Rushdie, *The Enchantress*, op.cit., p. xxx.

33) cf. the very short reference to the novel “The Enchantress of Florence. By Salman Rushdie; out now”, in: TIME, June 23, 2008, p. 47.

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